

“El sentimiento trágico de la vida:” Notes on Regional Styles in Nuevo Mexicano Ballads

Enrique R. Lamadrid

In a photograph dated May 26, 1946, the eminent Mexican musicologist Vicente T. Mendoza stands to one side, tightly clutching a spiral notebook, watching in respectful awe as a blind and aged singer named José Gallegos crosses a dirt road in the remote village of Tierra Azul (see p. vi). The distance between the men suggests that they have not yet met and that their recording session is yet to begin. Behind them is a dusty car. The village is on the northern slope of the Jémez mountains, more than a hundred miles north of Albuquerque. Not far to the south—as the crow flies—is Los Alamos, the secret laboratory that made the atomic bombs that brought World War II to an abrupt and apocalyptic end. In the background behind the car, two older men are standing apprehensively by a wooden gate. It is a critical moment in the cultural history of New Mexico. Like the old man, old-time Nuevo Mexicano folkways and traditional culture are stepping out of the picture and into oblivion. Soldiers returning from the war are faced with the economic and social imperative to build America in a new image. The pressure toward assimilation had never been more relentless or uncompromising.

Vicente T. Mendoza came to New Mexico to catch a glimpse of the vanishing musical landscape that tourist writer Charles Lummis noted in 1881 and that the native scholar Aurelio M. Espinosa described so nostalgically in 1915 in his *Romancero nuevomejicano*. Notable scholars and folklorists like Juan B. Rael (1951), Arturo L. Campa (1933, 1946), Rubén Cobos (1950), and Richard B. Stark (1969) followed these footsteps, as did field workers such as Aurora Lucero-White Lea (1953); A. Armendáriz of the

Works Progress Administration before the war; and members of the New Mexico Folklore Society, including Leonora Curtin, Lolita Pooler, and Thomas M. Pearce. The first musical scholar to work on the Nuevo Mexicano musical tradition was John D. Robb, who was instrumental in bringing Mendoza north to the University of New Mexico. The exhaustive archival investigations and field work Mendoza accomplished in the following eight months resulted in the first comprehensive study of Nuevo Mexicano folk music, written in collaboration with his wife, renowned folklorist Virginia Rodríguez. Vicente T. Mendoza brought skills and insights to bear that in New Mexico have not been surpassed. Although *Estudio y clasificación de la música tradicional hispánica de Nuevo México* was published posthumously four decades later (1986), it has been the foundation for all subsequent research. Mendoza's gift was to combine the insight of a literary scholar with the finely tuned ear of a musicologist. His precise musicological analyses have unlocked the mystery of the Nuevo Mexicano musical style, and his observations on genre classification, popular poetry, ballads, and lyric expression are a major contribution to the field, intimately informing John D. Robb's magnum opus (1980) and providing a counterpoint to the theories of Espinosa, Rael, Campa, and the distinguished Texas Mexican scholar, Américo Paredes (1993).

With this short tribute, we return now to the scene in Tierra Azul and the anticipation that Mendoza must have been feeling before hearing José Gallegos perform. Although Gallegos would sing *corrido* and *décima* ballads—genres well known to Mendoza—there was something distinctive, even primordial about his performance that moved and inspired Mendoza, something ineffably Nuevo Mexicano. The most notable ballad that Gallegos sang that afternoon in Tierra Azul was the *Corrido de la muerte de Antonio Maestas*, the tragic story of a young *vaquero* who in the summer of 1889 was killed by his horse on a roundup high in the mountains.

Del Rancho de los Ingleses
salió el hombre bueno y sano

From the ranch of the
Englishmen
the man left in good health

a dar rodeo a la hacienda	to ride the rounds of the ranch
según la orden de su amo.	obeying the orders of his boss.
Joven, alegre, y lozano,	Young, happy, and handsome,
fue resignado a su suerte;	he was resigned to his fate;
salió a recibir la muerte	he went out to receive death
en el lomo de un caballo	on the back of a horse.
	(Robb 1980, 523, my translation)

Since the cowboy died alone, there is no description of the moment of death or what happened to his horse. Subsequent verses linger on the grisly discovery of the body and the anguish of the grief-stricken Maestas family, especially the father and the young widow. Beyond the mention of the absent Englishmen, there is no hint of cultural conflict or any theme beyond the tragic events themselves.

Also present at the performance, John D. Robb was impressed by the antiquity of the ballad (c. 1889) and celebrated this find in an article claiming it as the oldest Nuevo Mexicano corrido he had found thus far (1950). On hearing the archival recording, the listener is struck by the profound sense of mourning and lamentation expressed in the verses and the manner in which they are sung a cappella with the same intensity and spirit as the Penitente Brothers' *alabado* hymns. Mendoza is more precise, offering an empirical basis for his conclusion:

La línea melódica es de tendencia descendente en cada uno de los incisos. El modo parece ser Eolio litúrgico. Rítmicamente es interesante por la disposición de sus anacrusas y valores de nota. El carácter que encierra es plañidero y de honda nobleza sentimental, muy al propósito del tema que narra.

[The melodic line has a descending tendency in each of the incisive phrases. The mode seems to be liturgical Eolian. Rhythmically it is interesting in the disposition of its *anacrusis* (pick-ups) and note values. The character it suggests is plaintive and of deep sentimental nobility, much in keeping with the theme that it narrates.] (Mendoza 1986, 462, my translation)

As a student of the greater Hispanic ballad tradition, Mendoza also notices some interesting aspects of the narrative poem itself. Unlike the memorial ballads from Mexico, which abound in themes of love, vengeance, and conflict, the main aspect of the plot is the tragedy itself in all its fatalistic inevitability:

no interviene ni el amor, ni la venganza, ni el odio, ni la guerra, sino la fatalidad; tanto por haber sido compuesto en su parte literaria como en su musical en Nuevo México pertenece a esta región y es por tanto patrimonio suyo

[neither love, nor vengeance, nor hate, nor war intervenes, only fatality; so much so for having been composed in literary and musical components in New Mexico, belonging to this region and being its legacy] (Ibid.)

Mendoza's conclusion is that both music and narrative contribute to what he identifies here, and in other compositions, as a distinctive regional style with a marked tragic sense of life and a stark, modal, musical expression to complement this vision.

Tourism, Hispanism, and Mystification

Before Mendoza's precise appraisals, much had been written in the impressionist vein about the laconic and sorrowful tonalities of the music of New Mexico. It was supposedly a romantic counterpart to the exotic desert landscapes, and listeners imagined they could hear strains of flamenco, the plaintive call to prayer from the minaret, the invocation of the cantor in the synagogue.

The prying scrutiny of the tourist gaze, which mystified and trivialized Nuevo Mexicano traditional culture, soon cast a pall over cultural studies in the region. Lummis himself set the stage with thinly veiled hispanophobia in his first travelogue, *Land of Poco Tiempo* ([1928] 1966), which contains a collection of folk songs—or “quaint ditties,” as he calls them. Besides the texts themselves, he takes note of the singing style popular in the nineteenth century, a forced, “screeching” tenor only rarely heard now. In the rest of the travelogue, Lummis gives new articulation to the commonly held view that the Nuevo Mexicanos are:

in-bred and isolation—shrunk descendants of the Castilian world—finders; living almost as much against the house as in it; ignorant as slaves, and more courteous than kings. (Lummis [1928] 1966, 5–6)

Their people-ragged courtiers, unlettered diplomats—are fast losing their pictorial possibilities. ... But the faces—they are New Spain still. (9)

Although he knew that Spain had a venerable centuries-old ballad tradition, it is evident from his attitude why he never suspected its presence in New Mexico, even though he had inadvertently collected fragments of one romance. His declaration, "Of anything like ballads, the New Mexicans have very few specimens," was proudly refuted by Aurelio M. Espinosa, whose ballad collection (or *Romancero*) grew to 248 versions of ninety Spanish ballads from New Mexico, twenty-seven of which are *romances tradicionales* (Espinosa 1953). The *Romancero de Nuevo Méjico* was a major chapter in the international Spanish ballad survey conducted by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, a close associate of Espinosa. New Mexico found an honored place on the map of international Hispanist scholarship.

Back at home, Espinosa's work was part of a Nuevo Mexicano *criollo* identity and regional consciousness that had been emerging since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Europeanized image of the Nuevo Mexicanos as "sons of the conquistadors" was a valuable asset in New Mexico's quest for U.S. statehood. Few cultural artifacts expressed this hispanophile thesis of New Mexico (as Spain on the banks of the Río Grande) more clearly than the composition of the *Romancero nuevomejicano*. As the politics of culture would dictate, nothing expresses the *mes-tizo* reality of New Mexico more clearly than what was only partially represented in the *Romancero*, the numerous regional *vulgar* ballads often referred to as *inditas* and largely dismissed as being of "purely local interest." Only the ones most similar to the Spanish traditional *antiguo* ballads would appear. In his introduction to this part of the collection, Espinosa explains why:

Los romances nuevomejicanos que damos en seguida no son en ningún sentido tradicionales ni conservan

siquiera elementos tradicionales. Son muy populares entre la juventud que ya va olvidando casi por completo los antiguos romances tradicionales, y son de interés puramente local. De este género de romances vulgares modernos poseo más de cincuenta, pero no siendo de importancia grande para el *Romancero Español*, sólo publicaré aquí algunos de los mejores, los que a causa de su sencillez, brevedad y desenvoltura se asemejan en algo a los romances tradicionales. El vulgo llama a estos romances por regla general, *corridos*, y también sin distinción alguna, *cuandos*, *inditas*, y *versos*.

[The New Mexican romance ballads that we present here are in no sense traditional nor do they conserve any traditional elements. They are very popular among the young people who are already forgetting almost completely the old traditional romances, and they are of purely local interest. Of this kind of vulgar romances, I possess more than fifty, but not being of great interest for the *Romancero Español*, I will only publish here the best of them, those that because of their simplicity, brevity, and design are similar in some way to the traditional romances. The people call these romances as a general rule *corridos*, and also, without any distinction, *cuandos*, *inditas*, and *versos*.] (Espinosa 1915, 503–504, my translation)

Espinosa later states that ballads of this regional type are “legion,” and that many of them are printed regularly, as soon as they are composed, in Spanish language newspapers—which between the 1860s and 1930s were the major cultural and political voice for the Nuevo Mexicanos (Kanellos 1993). Espinosa assures his readers that under no circumstances will he collect or publish ballads that have appeared in their pages (Espinosa 1915, 511).

Despite the importance and integrity of his work, Espinosa tips the cultural balance irrevocably toward Spain, so much so that one of his students, Arturo L. Campa, feels obliged to respond. In numerous references in his 1933 monograph on Nuevo Mexicano music, and later in a famous series of articles that appeared as part of the Coronado Cuatro Centennial celebrations in 1940, Campa insists on the Mexican roots of Nuevo Mexicano traditional culture (Campa 1933, Arellano et al. 1980).

Campa and the collectors and folklorists that follow him have since filled many of the gaps in the *Romancero*. Curiously, however, none have written anything more than notes on the cultural significance of the regional genres, especially the *indita*, which so stunningly expresses the cultural hybridity of New Mexico.

This is the cultural scenario that Vicente T. Mendoza visited in 1945–1946. The debate on the origins and influences of Nuevo Mexicano music and the definition of the canon was taking place among literary scholars. As a musicologist, he was able to clarify and ultimately demystify many of the arguments. He also provides a point of departure for the project to define the regional style of New Mexico.

Nearly half a century would pass before ethnographic studies with the same degree of musicological rigor would emerge to raise inquiry of New Mexican folk music to a new level (Romero 1993).

Toward a Definition of Nuevo Mexicano Regional Style

In a seminal article entitled “The Folklore of Groups of Mexican Origin in the United States” ([1966], 1993), Américo Paredes offers his thesis of the importance of cultural conflict in the emergence of Mexican American folklore, plus a careful and insightful assessment of three principal approaches to Mexican American folklore: the Hispanophile, the Diffusionist, and the Regionalist.

The Hispanophile approach accentuates and privileges Spanish Peninsular origins and distances itself from Mexico. This approach, most frequently used to define the folklore of New Mexico,

has no more than a remote likeness to the folklore found south of the border between the United States and Mexico, since the latter is mixed with indigenous elements which have diluted its grace and elegance. (Paredes 1993:4)

In its less extreme and more scholarly applications, the Hispanophile approach is based on chronology:

While folklore of Spanish origin in the United States, we are told, has its sources in colonial Mexico, this folklore reached the southwestern United States long ago when Mexico was New Spain, centuries before modern Mexico was formed. The Spanish folklore of the United States is thus superior to that of Mexico, not only because it is *criollo* (Spanish-American) with impeccable colonial credentials, but also because it represents survivals of ancient and valuable European forms. (Ibid.)

The Diffusionist approach privileges the centrality of Mexico and bases its analysis on the historical south-to-north movement of settlement and cultural patterns. It inevitably sees Mexican American folklore as derivative, a detritus of cultural forms that have their origins in the south.

The converse of the Hispanophile opinion, [the diffusionist opinion] regards Mexican American folklore as in no way different, original, or important, since it is merely a collection of decayed chips scattered from the trunk. We might perhaps find a few variants of texts well known in Mexico, variants which would serve as footnotes to Mexican folklore. (Paredes 1993, 5)

Mendoza is, of course, a Diffusionist, and Paredes does take him to task for several oversights stemming from his unfamiliarity with the border traditions.

The Regionalist approach, on the other hand, pays close attention to regional culture against a backdrop of national culture. Regional folklore is:

the offshoot of some distant trunk of national folklore which has put down deep roots in North American soil and developed characteristics of its own. (Ibid.)

On the negative side of the ledger, Regionalists may ignore the origins of the materials they work with and often lack sufficient preparation in Spanish to grasp its subtleties. They also tend to privilege the peculiarities of regional culture, looking "for local color, for the rare, the archaic, the bizarre" (Paredes 1993, 17).

Paredes refines the Regionalist approach as he identifies the central paradigm of Mexican American folklore:

cultural conflict. He reminds us that it is conflict that engenders and galvanizes the emerging Mexican nationalism of the nineteenth century. Opposition to the French occupation of the 1860s and the regime of Maximilian of Hapsburg defined Mexican patriotism and national identity. Mendoza traces the origins of the Mexican corrido ballad to this period and the subsequent popular resistance to the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz.

In the north, however, the formative period of conflict occurs several decades earlier when the expansionist intentions of the United States became clear in Texas in the 1830s. Fragments of the heroic corridos that celebrate the struggle against the North American government date to the 1850s, culminating in the uprising of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina in 1859.

One of the earliest ballads from New Mexico dates to 1841 and the defeat and capture of the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition by the militia of Governor Manuel Armijo. This victory is also celebrated in the folk play "Los Texanos" (Espinosa et al. 1943). In his memoirs, Nuevo Mexicano military officer Rafael Chacón recalls the following fragments of a *cuando* ballad composed by a poet named Jorge Ramírez. *Cuandos* are popular ballads that ironically or sarcastically incorporate the interrogative "cuándo," rhetorically asking "when" will an anticipated event come to pass or when will the person in the ballad be surpassed. Chacón identifies the ballad as a *cuando* even though the fragment lacks the word itself. "Cook" in the ballad was actually William G. Cooke, a civil commissioner traveling with the Texan-Santa Fe expedition, whose military commander was Colonel General Hugh McLeod (Chacón and Meketa 1986, 358).

Cook á México pasó
Con su escuadra la Tejana,
A reclamar á Santa Anna
Las tierras que le vendió;

Cook into Mexico crossed
With his Texan expedition,
To recover from Santa Ana
The lands he had sold to
him.

Pero Armijo no entregó
Lo que ellos venían cobrando
Pelotazos les fué dando
A todos esos señores,

But Armijo did not deliver
What they were demanding
Volleys of shot he was giving
To all those men,

Vengan otros cobradores
Que aquí está Armijo pagando.

May others come to collect
That which Armijo is
paying here.

Leyes y Constitución
Traian para sistemar,
Y la esclavitud plantar
Era toda su intención;
Ellos reclaman unión

Laws and Constitution
They brought to systematize
And slavery to cultivate
Was their whole intention;
They demand unification
(Chacón and Meketa
1986, 19, 341)

Within a few short years, however, the heroic reputation of Armijo deteriorated into allegations of treason. According to historians and popular opinion, the former scourge of the Anglo Texans, guardian of liberty, and defender of New Mexico from slavery was probably complicit in the 1846 U.S. military invasion of New Mexico, which met no resistance from the local militia. The war in New Mexico was won not so much with force of arms as with the economics of contraband. By 1846 the Nuevo Mexicano native elites had their fortunes invested in the commerce of the Santa Fe trail, which was much more profitable than the restrictive trade relations with Chihuahua and the rest of the Mexican Republic.

After the U.S.–Mexico war, political and cultural resistance took other forms in New Mexico. For historical reasons, the symbol of the Mexicano hero defending his rights “*con su pistola en la mano*” (with his pistol in his hand) never took root in New Mexico as it did in Texas. The predominant trope in folkloric as well as literary expression became the elegy. The Mexican border was moved five hundred miles south, from the Arkansas to the lower Río Grande. The homeland was lost, but the people continued to inhabit it. Their exile as well as the new border became internalized and part of a new psychology. The Nuevo Mexicano was now a “stranger in his own land.” The primary form of resistance and refuge became the lament and the only insurgency that of the spirit.

But this is not to say that the Nuevo Mexicanos embraced their destiny with resignation or passivity. Barely a decade and a half into the U.S. occupation, New Mexico faced yet another armed invasion of Anglo Texans in the

first weeks of 1862. This time 3,500 volunteers had already responded, over 90 percent were Spanish-speaking Nuevo Mexicanos, in what they were to call La Guerra de Valverde or La Guerra de Glorieta—known to the rest of North America as the Great Civil War. Rafael Chacón, Captain of Company K of the U.S. First Infantry Regiment, fired some of the first shots of the Battle of Valverde on February 16 (and some of the last on April 15) at Confederate troops hastily retreating after their defeat at the Battle of Glorieta. No ballads survive from this conflict, but Chacón takes note of the victory in his memoirs:

[A] sentiment of pride for my race makes me note a reflection on their martial character. ... They have fought and died, always with the faith that it was necessary for them to defend their hearths. Obligated by circumstances to defend themselves with weapons, in the country and in the villages ... they soon raised among their sons a populace of soldiers by nature intelligent, intrepid, valiant, and lovers of their country and of their liberty. The New Mexicans, raised in the use of arms from their childhood, did not know what fear was and God grant that those in whose hands our destiny has fallen will begin someday to appreciate their beautiful qualities and their temperaments. (Chacón and Meketa 1986, 185–186)

The poignancy of these hopes is also the measure of what they were pitted against: the impoverishment, alienation, and subordination of the Nuevo Mexicanos under their new masters.

The next invasion of Anglo Texans took place over the succeeding decades, as millions of acres of grazing land fell into the hands of lawyers, squatters, and cattlemen. The following verses and chorus from “Me quemaron el rancho” (They Burned My Ranch), a nineteenth-century *indita* ballad, are indicative of the tone of lamentation present in many ballads from the same period. *Inditas* (little Indian song or girl) are popular ballads that incorporate the word as a refrain, or which have something to do with Native American relations. This distinctive Nuevo Mexicano genre will be explored in a subsequent study. Unlike most corridos, which narrate a series of events from start to finish, most *inditas* use choruses which provide a note of reflection on the events.

Chorus

¡Ay, indita, eso no,
en el rincón colorado
la quemazón me rodeó.

Oh, indita, not that,
in the red canyon
the wildfire surrounded me.

Decía Santiago López,
demostrando sus enojos,
—¡Ay, indita de mi vida,
ya no puedo de los ojos!

Santiago López said,
showing his anger,
“Oh, indita of my life,
my eyes can no longer
stand it!”

chorus

Y son tan duras las llamas,
es fuerte el humaredón,
que no hallaba qué hacer
en esa cruel ocasión.

The flames were so hot,
the smoke was so strong,
that I did not know what
to do
in that cruel situation.

chorus

En medio de la montaña
arreando mis ovejitas,
pues cuando menos pensé
me encontré una lagunita.

In the middle of the
mountains
as I drove my sheep,
when I least expected it
I found a little lake.

chorus

En medio de la lagunita
una borrega maté,
y le quité la zalea
y a toditas las salvé.

In the middle of the little
lake
I killed a sheep
and removed its hide
and saved them all.

chorus

Que nos querían quemar,
hicieron una emboscada;
pues con sacos de guangoche
ahí andaba la gringada.

They wanted to burn us
out,
so they made an ambush;
then with gunny sacks
the gringo mob was
moving round.

chorus

Les prendieron a los montes,
a las montañas y llanos,
porque querían echar
afuera los mexicanos.

They set the hills on fire,
the mountains and plains,
because they wanted to
drive
away the Mexicans.

chorus

Pues para subir al cielo
San Pedro tiene las llaves,
estos versos los compuso
mi sobrino Víctor Chaves.

To reach heaven
Saint Peter holds the keys,
these verses were composed
by my nephew Victor
Chaves.

chorus

(Robb 1980, 449-450)

The only heroism expressed here is the courage to survive. Resistance in this case is constituted by testimonial memory and the first person lament of a survivor. The gringos burn the ranch house and set range fires to drive the mexicanos off. The miracle is that in the midst of the inferno the shepherd finds a lake and saves his sheep, even as he loses his land. The trauma is reflected on by the first person narrator and reiterated in the chorus: "The wildfire surrounded me, but I survived." The singing style is a cappella, again reminiscent of the alabado hymns.

"Los corridos de Kiansas": Tejanos y Nuevo Mexicanos

Besides the early corrido ballads that sing of cultural and military conflict, Paredes identifies another early type of corrido that documents the adventures of Mexicans deep in the interior of the United States. When more settlers moved into the west after the U.S.-Mexico war and the Civil War, new markets opened up and new railheads in Kansas made the cattle business fabulously lucrative. When the great buffalo herds were exterminated and the reservation-bound Indians had to be fed with government contracts, cattle drives became a way of life for the *vaqueros* of the southwest. The "Corrido de Kiansas" is an early corrido sung about the very first drives north from Texas to Kansas.

A comparison between versions collected in Texas and New Mexico will conclude this argument distinguishing the two regional styles.¹ The Texas versions ("Kiansas I & II") stress intercultural rivalry and boast the superior skill and daring feats of the mexicano vaqueros, when compared to their Anglo-American counterparts. Paredes himself collected "Kiansas II" in Brownsville, Texas, in the 1930s:

Cuando salimos pa' Kiansas
con una grande corrida,
gritaba mi caporal:
—Les encargo a mi querida.

When we left for Kansas
with a big cattle drive,
my foreman shouted:
"Take good care of my
beloved."

Contesta otro caporal
—No tengas cuidado, es sola;

que la mujer que es honrada
aunque viva entre la bola.—

Another foreman shouts:
"Fear not, she has no
other loves;
for if a woman is virtuous,
no matter if she lives
among men."
(Paredes 1976, 55)

This Texas version opens on a light romantic note which doubts—then affirms—the honor of the foreman's woman during his absence at the cattle drive.

Quinientos novillos eran,

todos grandes y livianos,
y entre treinta americanos

no los podían embalar.

There were five hundred
steers,
all large and swift,
and between thirty
American cowboys
they couldn't bunch them
up.

Llegan cinco mexicanos,
todos bien enchivarrados,
y en menos de un cuarto de hora

los tenían encerrados.

Five Mexicans arrive,
all wearing good chaps,
and in less than a quarter
hour
they had them penned up.

Esos cinco mexicanos
al momento los echaron,

y los treinta americanos
se quedaron azorados.

Those five Mexicans
in a moment put in the
steers,
and the thirty Americans
were left astonished.

These verses are typical of the heroic Texas style corrido, born from cultural conflict and relentless in its boasts. Historically, American cowboys learned their skills and borrowed their vocabulary (not to mention their stock) from Mexican sources. Here, five Mexicans do the work that is too much for thirty amazed Americans.

Los novillos eran bravos,
no se podían soportar,
gritaba un americano:
—Que se baje el caporal.—

The steers were vicious,
it was very hard to hold
them,
an American shouted:
“Let the foreman go into
the corral.”

Pero el caporal no quiso
y un vaquero se arrojó;
a que lo matara el toro
nomás a eso se bajó.

But the foreman didn't
want to
and a vaquero took the
dare;
for the bull to kill him
that's all he managed to do.

Besides the impressive roundup, the main dramatic event in the *corrido* is the death of a young vaquero in a corral. Interethnic rivalry and a dare, probably accompanied with a bet, are the motivation for the vaquero to enter the corral while the foreman was reluctant and the American unwilling.

La mujer de Alberto Flores
le pregunta al caporal:
—Déme usted razón de mi hijo,
que no lo he visto llegar.—

The woman of Alberto
Flores
asks the foreman:
“Give me word of my son
for I haven't seen him
return.”

—Señora, yo le diría,
pero se pone a llorar;
lo mató un toro frontino
en las trancas de un corral.—

“Lady, I would tell you,
but I know that you will cry;
he was killed by a blaze-
faced bull
against the rails of a corral.”

Ya con ésta me despido
por el amor de mi querida,

Now with this I take my
leave
by my sweetheart's love,

ya les canté a mis amigos

I have now sung for my
friends

los versos de la corrida.

the verses of the cattle drive.

The corrido ends with the foreman telling the vaquero's mother the unfortunate news about her son who is even named in the verses. But without any pathos at all, the last verse returns to the thought of an absent sweetheart and mention of the performance context of the singer entertaining his friends with news of the big cattle drive.

A simple comparison to a Nuevo Mexicano version, sung by Adolfo Maés in Canjilón in 1949 for John D. Robb, reveals once again the hallmarks of the Nuevo Mexicano style. This version, sung *a cappella* in a plaintive tonality, explores the tragic dimensions of the story (Robb 1980, 531–532). From the opening scenes, it is clear that this is not a boastful song to entertain friends. There is no flirting, hardly a hint of interethnic rivalry, nor even a single mention of the Americans. The ballad begins with travail and tears and ends with a mother's lament for the death of her son. Yet, the New Mexican corrido shares several identical verses, dramatic scenes, musical structures, and the first person plural narration of the Texas versions.

"El Corrido de Kiansas," as sung in New Mexico, opens with a complaint about the tremendous work and responsibility of the massive new style of cattle driving which these vaqueros were the first to experience.

Cuando salimos para Kiansas
con aquella novillada,
¡ay, qué trabajos pasamos
por aquella llanada!

When we went to Kansas
with that herd of cattle,
oh, what work we had
on that endless plain!

The other Texas version "Kiansas I" also has verses describing the enormous task at hand. There is also a storm and a stampede, but they are not quite as ominous and threatening as these verses:

Como las nubes eran tan prietas
y sin alcanzar el corral,

los truenos eran tan recios

que nos hacían llorar.

The clouds were so black
and we couldn't reach the
corral,

the thunderbolts were so
loud

that they made us cry.

At this precise moment in "Kiansas I," the *caporal* or foreman desperately shouts orders "como queriendo llorar" [as if he were about to cry] but fights back the tears (Paredes 1976, 53). In the New Mexico version, the thunder is so awesome that all the vaqueros burst into tears. The theme of men crying is powerful and ambivalent, as Paredes points out ([1958] 1990, 228–229). In the New Mexico version, the tears of the brave and resourceful vaqueros are consistent with the underlying tragedy of the ballad. Heroism in this context lies in the Herculean magnitude of their labor and their resolve in the face of hardship.

Cinco mil eran los novillos
los que íbamos a llevar,
entre quince mexicanos
no los pudimos dominar.

The cattle numbered five
thousand
which we had to take;
among fifteen Mexicans
we could not control them.

It is no surprise that the number of steers in this drive is ten times the five hundred reported in the Texas versions. Even fifteen Mexicans could not prevail in these circumstances. Overstatement is part of heroic discourse; however, it must be remembered that, historically speaking, never before had so many cattle been moved so far.

The only overt boast in the New Mexico version is a more modest one. Since the vaqueros are from Río Grande country, they of course know how to swim. Similar verses are found in the Texan "Kiansas I."

Bajamos al Río Grande,
no había barco en que pasar.
El caporal nos decía,
—Muchachos, se van a ahogar.—

We went down to the Río
Grande,
there was no boat in
which to cross.
The foreman said to us,
"Boys, you're going to
drown."

Los vaqueros le responden
todos en general,
—Si somos del Río Grande,
de los buenos para nadar.—

The cowboys replied
all together,
"But we are from the Río
Grande,
of the ones that know
how to swim."

Besides the cattle drive itself, the death of the young vaquero in the corral is the other element common to all versions of the ballad. The vaquero's death here is a marked contrast to the same event in the Texas corridos. There is no boast and no bet, just a cowboy attempting a difficult task and paying with his life.

En el valle de palomas
salió un novillo huyendo.
El caporal lo lazaba
en su caballo berrendo.

In the valley of doves
a steer went astray.
The foreman lassoed him
On his spotted horse.

La madre de un vaquero
le pregunta al caporal,
—¿Qué razón me das de mi hijo?
que no lo he visto llegar.—

The mother of a cowboy
asked the foreman,
"What news have you of
my son?
for I haven't seen him
arrive."

—Señora, yo le dijera
pero ha de querer llorar,
su hijo lo mató un novillo
en las trancas de un corral.—

"Lady, I will tell you
but it will make you weep,
a steer killed your son
against the logs of a corral."

Si seguimos como vamos
y como vamos seguimos,
aquí se acabó cantando
los versitos de un vaquero.

If we keep on as we go
and go as we keep on,
here is ended the singing
of the verses of a cowboy.

Even the *despedida* (farewell) verse expresses a certain fatalism. Here we are doing what we are doing, dangerous work. There the ballad ends. No reference to a sweetheart's love or to entertaining friends here. This corrido edifies the listener through its lament as it reminds of the dangers, consequences, and sacrifices of life and work.

In a study of the corrido "Los sediciosos," about the rebellion of Aniceto Pizaña and its repercussions, Richard Flores makes a convincing case for the emergence of a distinct *tejanomexicano* identity, shaped by the dynamics of ethnicity, in contraposition to the *puro mexicano* from the other side of the border. He states that:

although it has been said that the cohesiveness of the corrido is that it speaks in a singular voice, and it represents the communal and integrated character of the community from which the corrido's authors and audience descend, I contend that the presence of the mexicotejano voice in the text of "Los Sediciosos" anticipates, through formal change and reflexive self-reference, the ethnic consciousness of later generations. (Flores 1992, 177)

Whether we look at origins, diffusion, conflict, or identity formation in the evolution of Mexican American balladry, it is evident that a distinct regional consciousness and expressive style evolved along the Upper Río Grande. It is a product of historical circumstance, or as the people would describe it, destiny itself. As a mode of expression, it embodies resistance not in the heroic terms of the lower Río Grande—and neither in abnegation nor self-pity. Rather, it seeks solace in the dignity of suffering, the witness of testimony, and the voice of survival, a lamentation not of loss but rather of redemption, of something that could be termed in universal and regional terms, as "un sentimiento trágico de la vida." Without fanfare or romantic intent, Vicente T. Mendoza noticed it in Tierra Azul in 1946 and described its musical and thematic qualities: "plaintive and of deep sentimental nobility ... neither love, nor vengeance, nor hate, nor war intervenes, only destiny" (Mendoza 1986, 462, my translation).

The stage is finally set for an inquiry into the rest of the *Romancero nuevomejicano*, that collection of cuandos, inditas, décimas, corridos, those *romances vulgares* in which the Indo-Hispano profile of Nuevo Mexico at last emerges.

NOTES

This research received initial support from the University of New Mexico Center for the Regional Studies during the 1994 Summer Institute "España a Española: de lo Castizo a lo Mestizo." Continuing support came from the Harvard Committee on Folklore and Mythology where I was a visiting scholar in the Fall of 1994. Special thanks to my students and colleagues, and to the John D. Robb Archive of Southwest Music.

1. Of the two Texas versions of "El Corrido de Kiansas," "Kiansas I" is more closely related to the New Mexico version in the melody, dramatic scenes, and verses. However, each still maintains its distinct regional character, with the heroic vision of Texas and the tragic vision of New Mexico. "Kiansas II" stands in sharper contrast and was used as the basis of this analysis. For a close comparison of the melodies and performance styles, consult Robb (1980, 531-532) and Paredes (1976, 53-55).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arellano, Anselmo, and Julián Josué Vigil. 1980. *Arthur L. Campa*. Las Vegas, NM: Editorial Telaraña.
- Campa, Arthur L. 1933. "The Spanish Folksong in the Southwest." *University of New Mexico Bulletin*, Modern Language Series, 4, no. 1.
- . 1946. *Spanish Folk-Poetry in New Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Chacón, Rafael, and Jacqueline Meketa, eds. 1986. *Legacy of Honor: The Life of Rafael Chacón, A Nineteenth Century New Mexican*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Cobos, Rubén. 1950. "El Folklore Nuevo Mexicano." *El Nuevo Mexicano* (Santa Fe) 9 (October 1949-16 November 1950).
- Espinosa, Aurelio M. 1915. "Romancero nuevomejicano." *Revue Hispanique* 33.
- . 1953. "Romancero de Nuevo Méjico". *Revista de Filología Española* 58.
- . 1985. *The Folklore of Spain in the American Southwest*, ed. J. Manuel Espinosa. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Espinosa, Aurelio M., and J. Manuel Espinosa. 1943. "The Texans: A New Mexican Folk Play of the Middle Nineteenth Century." *New Mexico Quarterly Review* 13, no. 3 (Autumn).
- Flores, Richard A. 1992. "The *Corrido* and the Emergence of Texas-Mexican Social Identity." *Journal of American Folklore* 105.
- Kanellos, Nicolás. 1993. "A Socio-Historic Study of Hispanic Newspapers in the United States." In *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage*, ed. Ramón Gutiérrez and Genaro Padilla. Houston: Arte Público Press.
- Lea, Aurora Lucero-White. 1953. *Literary Folklore of the Hispanic Southwest*. San Antonio: Naylor.
- Lummis, Charles. [1928] 1966. *The Land of Poco Tiempo*. Reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- McDowell, John Holmes. 1981. "The *Corrido* of Greater Mexico as Discourse, Music, Event." In *And Other Neighborly*

- Names": Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*, ed. Richard D. Bauman and Roger D. Abrahams. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Mendoza, Vicente T., and Virginia R. R. de Mendoza. 1986. *Estudio y clasificación de la música tradicional hispánica de Nuevo México*. Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México .
- Paredes, Américo. [1958] 1990. *"With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Reprint, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . [1966] 1993. "The Folklore of Groups of Mexican Origin in the United States." In *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, ed. Richard Bauman. Austin: University of Texas.
- . 1976. *A Texas Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Rael, Juan B. 1951. *The New Mexico Alabado*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Robb, John Donald. 1950–51. "The Origins of a New Mexico Folksong." *New Mexico Folklore Record* 5.
- . 1980. *Hispanic Folk Music of New Mexico and the Southwest: A Self-Portrait of a People*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Romero, Brenda. 1993. "The Matachines Music and Dance in the San Juan Pueblo and Alcalde, New Mexico: Contexts and Meanings." Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Stark, Richard B., and T. M. Pearce. 1969. *Music of the Spanish Folk Plays of New Mexico*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.

ENRIQUE LAMADRID. Associate Professor at the Department of Romance Languages, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. A folklore scholar, Professor Lamadrid has conducted extensive research on the oral narrative in New Mexico.